

SAM TATA February 9, 1979.

000 K.T. I'll give you a big first lead question. Your earlier stuff which has to do with India, Kashmir and Shanghai is primarily street stuff, people on the street who inhabit those various countries. And currently you're working on portraits of individual people. Do you find that a natural evolution? Or how did you move from one to the other?

ST. Well actually <sup>1</sup>004 [I started with the portrait. When I ~~then~~ look back and is strangely enough.] 006.  
I think my <sup>consuming</sup> interest was <sup>and is</sup> the portrait. <sup>strangely enough.</sup> Its funny.

There was a newspaper competition in 1936. in the China Press as they call it. There's the North China Daily News, the China Press and there's an evening paper too, the Evening ~~Press~~ <sup>Post</sup> or something like that, I think it was called, run by an American, Randon Gould.

And the North China Daily News was known as the Lady of the Bun, the Old Lady of the Bun; it was a very conservative, very British, very conservative-looking paper. But I think it was the best paper we had. But the China Press was a really American paper. It had baseball. There was baseball in Shanghai at the International community. Anyway.. let me see now. To get back to the China Press. They had some kind of newspaper competition and by the time I'd borrowed my dad's camera and I was

playing around with my father's camera. I didn't know a thing.

I had lots of underexposed negatives. I had no idea. I had no clue at all but there was this competition. I sent it (a picture) in and one week I won ~~a~~ <sup>second</sup> prize and the next week <sup>(to)</sup> my youngest brother, I ~~said~~ said "sit in the chair in the study, it'll make a nice picture." And I borrowed my dad's horizontal shaped graphlex. They had a large graphlex but then they had a horizontal format. And <sup>not</sup> just 3x4 or 4x5. And so I did a picture of him and I sent it

in and I won the first prize. It was a portrait. And I find

(2) 025 that [even when I first showed in '47 in Bombay, - a one man show, - most of the photographs were portraits. They were all very academic you know, the dark background, the 45° Rembrandt lighting. ~~You know~~, All these preconceived notions, they were all very artificial. You know I just used one flood as I told you before and a reflector, and I did mention that I worked with that. And I don't... First there is the principle that there is only one sun. There are not  $\frac{1}{2}$  a dozen suns. So the light comes from one direction primarily and if it's too harsh a light, then you either use a second light to cut into it, cut into the shadows or use a reflector.] 032 So



of course, using a secondary light you have problems if you're too close to the ~~wall~~ wall. You have shadows on the ~~wall~~ wall and of course that was absolutely taboo. You know. It was ugly

K.T. Those were the portraits that you did which you refer to as your "salon" work.

ST. Ya. They were all, they were all portraits done. They were all salon type of portraits. Is that what you just asked me? <sup>(3) 036</sup> Ya they were all salon type and I began almost in the German tradition of ~~the~~ a part of the face - the eyes, the mouth, close-up. You know in the old days the German movies, there were all kinds of close-ups, they were terrific. ~~the~~ And I guess there was some kind of sub-conscious influence <sup>there.</sup> <sup>040</sup> And that's how I began. This old Chinese gentleman who worked in my dad's office. I have a fairly close-up one of him. You've seen that one, with his glasses and the eyes + the mouth and all that. And then slowly I began to move my camera back. I saw work by a guy called Julian Smith, who's an Australian pictorial photog - Dr Julian Smith. And that fascinated me, the idea of the use of hands and much later Karsh and his use of hands. And so I've had a lot of influences. And Steichen. You know I like the work of Steichen.

I think it was Steichen much before Karsh, of course. Because I didn't see Karsh's work, of course, until after the war you know.

048 (4) KT. But those portraits in a sense are very different from the ones you are doing now.

ST. Oh very very much different. The ones I'm doing now, were begun in '49. And there was still quite - unquote, a loyalty to the old methods.

I'd go back to the bigger camera and take pictures and at the same time I use my Leica in available light. 052. The Russian sculptress Tyebana Prokofiev in Shanghai. By this time, I had already met Cartier-Bresson in '48 and talking with him and the fact that he lived in my father's house at the same time. There were a lot of conversations, a lot of argument. It was marvellous. And so slowly I was sort of breaking away. It was that I was breaking away from day to day, that one day I was doing ~~another~~ one thing and another day I was doing another thing. Not quite. You know it was like being weaned. And then of course, when I was in Hong Kong and even when I got here, <sup>for the first year or so,</sup> I used to visit people with my Leitz and with my Roliflex. And then one day I got into an argument with a well to do woman who wanted to cut down on my



prices. I'd said it was \$25 a print or something. I don't know what it was and she said it was \$25 for 2. So that day I decided that was it. I'd work for the magazines, <sup>+ that was it and</sup> never mind all these portraits and I wanted to cut away once and for all.

KI. So you were doing those portraits on commission?

ST. Oh commission, ya. To make some money. You know so and so's darling daughter wanted to be photographed and the parents wanted to do it. One day <sup>a</sup> lady, the parents were friends, one day she said she had another customer for me. And I said "I'm not doing it any more." And she said "Oh you're getting to be high hat, are you?" I said "No. I've had too much trouble with this sort of thing." And anyway I only have to please editors when I do work for magazines. You know I don't have to please not only the ego of the sitter, but what the sitter's mother and brother + sister + wife and all think. I've had too much of that

└ thank you.

KI. Did you retouch those photographs.

ST. Not myself. Nor myself. <sup>I had somebody to retouch them.</sup> By the time I got here, there was no retouching. You know to retouch on a rolli, it was very difficult.

If you had a 3x4. My teacher in formal portraiture used to retouch my stuff.

And he taught me how to make good prints his name is Oscar Sepol. I think

he's still alive. I saw him in San Francisco in 1960 on my way here. And then

I talked to him some time ago. So I think he's still alive. So one day I

did a very formal portrait of the younger brother of one of my school

friends. I made some prints. Oscar retouched the negatives. I made

some prints and I took them to Oscar. And he blew a gasket.

He said. "You're talking <sup>Mayfa.</sup> ~~my friend~~ this kind of a print? And I said, "Why

Oscar, you think he'll know the difference?" He said, "You know that his

father knows old man Josepho? (Who was a top professional). And what if

he shows ~~them~~ it to old man Josepho?" I said "Come on, what's he

going to show it to the old man for? He said "No, you have to make

a good print, otherwise I'm not going to spot it for you." I said "Well

I guess you're right. I'm taking money from the kid, from his

father, you know." So I went back and I made some very good prints.

So he said "Very very good." And would you believe it, they were

shown to Old man Josepho. So I learnt my lesson that especially

if you're being paid for it, you know, you have to print. And I find

people who go into a darkroom + make one print, you don't know unless



you've made a print a little darker, a little lighter from the control, bumped and so on, you don't know. I mean Eugene Smith, I think used to make them by the dozen before he was happy with what he had. But he was very exacting on himself.

KT. But these portraits now where you show an individual in his environment basically, do you think that's more descriptive of the individual?

ST. Oh absolutely, absolutely. Because in the other manner of approach you just don't know very much about the person and when I took a picture of my father in the old days, I knew it was my father.

And my friends were my friends. But by that time <sup>of course</sup> I was already pulling my camera back a little bit, my dad with his walking stick in his hand and his hat on his head. ~~There's something about the hat.~~ <sup>There's some. without the hat</sup>

And things like that. Even in India later on, I was beginning to use backgrounds. Mulchra Janard, the Indian writer, there's a portrait. But

I still used the photofloods. I still hung onto that and the bigger

camera. But there's Mulch with his books + paintings. And so there's

very <sup>many</sup> influences fighting against each other. But eventually I abandoned

the lights, because I read a long time ago that the most beautiful light

in the world is daylight. It's a natural beautiful soft light, which it is you see. In all these portraits which I've done especially since coming here, on artists - and artists is used in the widest sense, the painter, the sculptor, <sup>the filmmaker</sup> the writer, you know, the poet, the essayist or whatever. They're all artists as far as I'm concerned. The word artist is not just for the imagemakers but for the people who make images with words or with music. The interpretive artist as well as the creative artist. You The singer, the dancer. You know it could be Charlevoix or it could be Emile Belcor, ~~you know~~, the opera singer or Andree Tourt. Or Pauline Julien. You know she said to me in French - you know I had to struggle, my French is not so good - she said "Oh this looks like an écrivain. You made me look so serious, a writer." But I thought, how could I interpret her as a singer, with her mouth wide open and a microphone in front of her? You know, like lots of people, I've taken pictures of Charlevoix. <sup>(5) 126</sup> [I find] I have a recipe for the kind of portrait I'm doing now. There are 3 sort of steps to it. The first thing is that the sitter has to be in complete agreement with the photographer. That he or she wants to be photographed. That there's no resistance to the idea. That makes it much more difficult. So once you have the subject agreeing, that's step 1.



The second step evolves around the photographer. He should <sup>enough, he should</sup> have ~~sense~~ be sensible enough, in the meaning of the French word 'sensibilité' or in the old english sense of the word which ~~was~~ was sensibility. Now that the photographer has to have. And then there has to be a rapport. there has to be a tune. And then you have the portrait. It's as simple as that. ] <sup>139</sup>.

KT. How do you go about...

ST. How do I go about it? I think one of the things that is in my favor is just my own personal make up. You know evolving from genes or whatever. I seem to put people at their ease. And I will not rush in. I not a newspaper photographer. Rush in and grab the shot and out again. And people I don't know - Very often when they're hospitable and they say 'would you like some tea?', I say yes. It gives me time to talk with them. (6) <sup>146</sup> ] Ian Mennis whom I met in gallery. He was introduced to me by Seymour Segal, the painter who had already talked about him. I was in the gallery and I said to Seymour, "this friend of yours, Mennis, is he still in town?" And he said 'He is, He's sitting right there.' So I turned to him and I said to him "Mr. Mennis, I'd like to photograph you."

He said "Why?" I said "Well, you know, you have a reputation and all that."

He said "Well do come along." I talked to him for 20 min, 30 min I forget.

I had the camera there on the table and we talked. The funny thing

I said 'I think you're ready' He said "yes, I'm ready, Let's go."

You know we both felt we had come to a point of accord. We were

in accordance. You know, I think, I took the first few pictures I took

where he was sitting and then he moved to another room where I

↳ got the photographs that you have seen. Sitting in a table. Now

I'm not a complete purist. I understand that Cartier-Bresson will

not touch anything anywhere. He will not touch anything or put

things out of the way. He observes people and photographs them.

I direct them, very loosely. I will not put them into any position

where they are not comfortable. I will allow them their head. But

I will direct them and there is always a friendly confrontation.

I think there is that. Other people like Cartier Bresson just observe

them and photograph. And other people just take completely over,

↳ they direct. But my directions are just little points. ] 167

KT. Do you choose the environment?

ST. Yes I'll say do you mind sitting here. Because somebody who's already  
old



and I don't want to move ~~to~~ them around I will just photograph them where they are and use maybe something - between 12-18 frames. Like with Kertesz. He was seated and I was seated and I took the pictures.

After all what I want is that one essential Kertesz or the one essential Leonard Cohen. I feel if you can't do it in 6 frames, then you can't do it. There are people who take 4 or 5 rolls and get 2 or 3 pictures or maybe more. But then it always becomes an accident. Not always an accident, you know. But then I can almost do it with 18. And I have.

With Bill Brandt it was eighteen exposures. With Kertesz it was 12. With Hartigue I think it was 12. You know these people are in their 70's and 80's. With young people you can ask them to move around the house. Sometimes I've shot 2 rolls. Very rarely. Because I spent the day with my good friend Reni Dimicopoulos, the architect. And I'm a very close friend. And we just spent the day photographing. The second day it was just one roll - he didn't have the time to have breakfast, lunch and dinner.

KT. Bill Brandt also does portraits of well known people - primarily artists. I'm sure you're familiar with them. The thing that interested me about his portraits was there seemed to be something...

the environment reflected what the person did. OK like the one of Dubuffet where there is the landscape in the background which looks like a Dubuffet painting...

ST. Well he has Francis Bacon in the streets of London. That's a great portrait. Do you know Snowden's portrait of Francis Bacon, <sup>which is very strong.</sup> An absolute close-up of those face and eyes. But you know it's interesting to see what time does to a human being as well as the various approaches. Coburn did Ezra Pound in 1911. 1911 or 1913. Very romantic Ezra Pound. Young. He did Augustus John the same year. And then later portraits by Eisenstat, Penn you know, by Karch. All different approaches. Ezra Pound later on by Avedon and in the final years, perhaps in the last year of his life, by Carter-Bresson, which is a very, very tortured Ezra Pound. But Carter-Bresson is very kind. Not all portraits are kind to the subject. Remember

I spoke one day about dignity. And Tom didn't quite agree with me. If I remember back, Tom Gibson. But I still feel that, I still feel that people are entitled to that. That one should not caricature or be cynical about people. Privately you may be cynical about people but you shouldn't express it. I think cynicism is a very negative thing.



Satire is something else. There's a difference. And humour is again something else. But.

KT. Do you try and put humour into your photographs?

ST. Not in my portraits you know. But usually in my still life. You know if I find something amusing... You know, I'm not motivated by still life.

If I see something in a handdresser's window, <sup>like I once did</sup> ~~you know~~, the portrait of a handdresser on St. Catherine Street in the early 70's. And there he was, a man in his fifties, you know, and all these manequins with the wigs, just the head + shoulders and the wigs. It was so amusing. I'm very much attracted to that. A psychoanalyst

might read something into that, some type of fetishism or something.

<sup>All these things amuse me</sup> I don't know, But I'm drawn to that. I did a bunch of them

in Tokyo, in Japan. Near Tokyo in a temple area. And I did in

Hong Kong. It was really amusing. It was in — on the mainland.

And these things amuse me. Usually I do them because I'm

amused and I don't think there's very much underlying that.

Somebody who's more probing and personal, understanding motivations

might write up something on that aspect. The same thing about

landscapes. I don't do many landscapes. It's a difficult thing.

landscapes are very difficult.

KT. Is it because you're not naturally attracted to them.

ST. No. no. I just realized I don't really know how to go about them. They have to be very very much so. I don't care for the banal landscape; it has to have something of subtlety and has to have if possible, people in it, just in the distance. Years ago in an issue of U.S. camera I saw a landscape by Cartier-Bresson. <sup>Evidently</sup> He was looking down on a range of mountains - he must have been at a much greater height - in Italy. And there was this massive - like 3 or 4 great mountains. And in the exact  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the picture there were these 3 men on mules, tiny, tiny figures. Just breathtaking. Without the figures there it would be just a mass of mountains. But with the 3 figures there, there's substance to it. I told him about it and he just couldn't recollect it.

So I sent him a photostat or something.

(7) 250

KT. I just want to come back to the portraits for a minute. [Why do you choose to portray well known people?

ST. Well there not really all well known. Because I'm a photographer I'm drawn to people, always have been drawn to people who are creative.

Or interpretive in the arts. Otherwise with my early training, I should



be doing business men. If Time magazine sends me out to do a businessmen,  
 I'll do him, I'll do him quite well. <sup>256</sup> But otherwise I'm drawn to people  
 who ... wherever I am. I was in Bombay. I was in Bombay for a  
 year and a half. I was drawn to people who were in those fields.

Editors of magazines, poets, writers, actors. One of the great actors of India  
 I got to know because I photographed 3 of his productions. Not for  
 any money, just for myself and for the magazines. So that's the thing.  
 And why I am drawn to the portrait, I really don't know. Maybe it's  
 because I like individuals. I don't much care for people in the mass,  
 you know. In the mass they're ~~totally~~ totally without a mind,  
 without a soul, if you use the term. They're just a great big thing  
 with more destructive potential than anything else.

KI. But in the pictures of Shanghai, India and so on, I mentioned the  
 other day that the people in the photographs, because of the population  
 of both countries, often reach Breughel's proportions.

SJ. Ya, yes I know. Because there is something about a body without,  
 a great big massive body without a mind. It almost seems at  
 some kind of signal or something, they'll all turn and destroy. As  
 has been happening in Persia, in Iran. But of course it has it's ...

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 9 [Don't forget that the Shanghai photographs were taken at a time of panic and turmoil because the population just didn't know what was going to happen. You know, with war you can always look on the dark side of things. As it turned out they had nothing to fear. Because the People's Liberation Army was exemplary in its behavior. So exemplary that the foreign correspondants kept sending reports abroad, you know, as to how stunned they were. But the whole object was to win the people over not bat them on the head. Or destroy them, you know, they were their own people.] 285 And get rid of Chiang. And I believe there were a lot of soldiers, of the Nationalists, that had defected over. I think that war was won as much by money as it was by force of arms.

10 289 [KT. It must ~~of~~ have been an incredible time to have been in China then. ST. Oh, it was. Definitely. But again as I mentioned the other day, at time, I was a person with a camera in my hands. I never left the house without a camera. Exciting things were happening. And I had met Cartier-Bresson the year before, had seen his work and many other things before. I was influenced by him and many other things combined. It seems like harking back to my 1st days in the streets. In 35, 36 before I went into this being an artist with a capital A, capital R, capital T.] 299



And the idea that the ~~the~~ <sup>pictorialist</sup> Salon type of photography, the pictorialist type of photography which had seen its heyday at the turn of the century ~~adhere~~ <sup>to</sup> Demachy and all those people had said all there had ~~to~~ be said about it. Because the same idea went on then, where it was said that the straight photograph couldn't be art. It had to be modified - gum printing. They all fell into it. Steichen was a master at it. And Bromoil. Alexander Keeley. I asked Jim <sup>yesterday,</sup> Jim Borcoman, if he knew Alexander Keeley and he said "Certainly." He's very well informed. Not many people know him. And then he tried to recall the name of a contemporary of Keeley's but at that time he couldn't. There were many people. There was F.J. Mortimer. And then there was G.L. Hawkins, master of the bromoil, an Englishman. Master of using 2 or 3 negatives and then he combined them. There were a number of people who did that, who used the combination of negatives. So Jerry Ulsman has had a lot of people to fall back on to create his own visual thing.

⑧. 318 (I should redo this)  
 KT. Was Cartier-Bresson the main ~~of~~ influence which took you from the non-straight image, the romantic portraits, to the straighter street work.  
 ST. Absolutely. Well I think I was ready for him. <sup>323</sup> I think I had primed

myself. Because when I got from Shanghai to India... And another thing which kept me indoors was the Japanese occupation of Shanghai.

Who dared to go ~~outdoors~~ and take photographs. You didn't know where you'd end up. And I had no desire to hide the camera in a little bag ~~and~~ as Krin Taconis did during the war. Oh ya. Krin got some amazing photographs at that time. Not very great ones because he was a beginner at that time. His work and the work of a number of other photographers who risked their lives, - because if they'd have been caught, they'd have been shot - was published later on in a book. But Krin has a very, very sound photographic history. So to go back to that, I think that's why I kept indoors when nobody bothered and nobody really cared. You know I'm just thinking now and this occurred to me right now while I'm talking to you ~~was~~ that I was encouraged to do that kind of thing rather than out on the streets. Because there's nothing I did on the streets during the war.

KT. I remember you saying, <sup>at one time</sup> that when your photographs were published at least one was misidentified

ST. Well of the Shanghai? Well not my photographs. Somebody else



who was there. There were a number of foreigners still in Shanghai. And I know that Time and Life's men were still there. All they did was.. It was a trial by the Nationalists of people accused being both communist and black marketeers. It was a paradox because they were so committed to being communist that they weren't going to do black marketeering, you know. So anyway, at that trial and later on I saw it, a number of years later. I was appalled. ~~The caption~~ It was the same trial, the same photograph and the neat captions said this was the work of communists. Putting people to death.

KT. You worked for a lot of magazines. Has something similar ever happened to you?

ST. On my photographs. No. I've never had that happen. No. A few errors that didn't matter one way or the other. But nobody has ever misused my work and misdirected the thing. No.

KT. What magazines have you worked for?

ST. Well, I've done work for Time in Hong Kong. I've worked for Time + Life in India. But for Life it was just a sporadic thing. The only one time when I had 3 or 4 photographs together was in 1949, when they didn't have anybody there and at one time, sort of head of the

scout movement in Shanghai, a man called Hawkins. He and his wife decided to ~~wait~~<sup>stay</sup> on the periphery of Shanghai and await the communist troops there. And they had mined that area. And the Nationalist troops wanted him to move into the city. And they said nothing doing and they put up sandbags. And that was my first *Life* story. But after that they were sporadic and I think on another  $\frac{1}{2}$  ~~dozen~~<sup>dozen</sup> occasions ~~at~~ there was one photograph at a time. Because usually by the time I did the story, it had died. And so my work for *Life* was never important. I did a lot of work for *Time* here in Montreal. I did much more than I thought I did. When I got all the stuff back, I couldn't even remember having taken a number of these businessmen and industrialists and scientists and others. But of course I've done a lot of work for other magazines. *MacLeans* both French and English, *Chatelaine's* both French and English, then an architectural magazine, *Canadian Art* maybe once or twice, and not often, of course and *Star Weekly*, of course, when it was *Star Weekly* and then *Weekend Magazine* with a number of covers, many of them of my daughters. I exploited that girl. Up to a certain age.

KI. And what about the recent work that's being published in *Canadian Fiction Mag.*



~~200~~ No

ST. Ah yes. I'm looking forward to the portraits in Canadian Fiction Mag. Geoffrey Hancock, who is the editor, had used 7 of my actors in a recent issue. And I told him, I said "you know, Geoffrey, I have about 25 or 30 portraits of writers. Would you like to bring out an issue of writers photographs." He said "That's fine." Then I discovered I had almost 50 in my files and to bring the number up, I went out and photographed people like Mari-Claire Blais and Jacques Feland. And the last one I photographed was Norman Levine ~~on my~~ in St Ives on my visit to England last year. I'm glad they will bring out that number. I think it's to appear in mid-March. What pleases me is that a whole issue, an issue on writers - and sometimes they will do a special issue; they did one on Mavis Gallant; it was a Mavis Gallant issue - to turn a whole issue over to a photographer, I think it's a very pleasant thought.

KT. What interests me is that it's a very appropriate place to put the photographs.

ST. I think so. You know, they are all writers. Whether they write on art like Russel Harper or they write children stories like Ariva Leighton, or poetry like Irving Leighton, or Leonard Cohen or Dudek. I have some of the, shall we say, the senior writers like Hugh McEwen, even

] Morley Callahan. I did a story on Morley Callahan. I once thought he  
 was an American because I used to read the stuff <sup>in school</sup> in Shanghai in the  
 O'Brien collection of short stories, yearly. McLean's said they wanted me  
 to do a story on Morley Callahan. And I said is he a Canadian writer?  
 And they said "what did you think?" So it was a picture story thing

and [he and his wife were staying at the Ritz-Carlton and we were  
 waiting for the elevator and he was looking out of the window, very  
 sort of, in his own private contemplation. And that's the portrait I have. ]

So it's not really a portrait in the sense of the other portraits and  
 yet it is you know. Because going back to Bill Brandt, a number of  
 his portraits were done on a set or on location. The one of Peter Sellers,  
 remember, where he's got a newspaper. He's doing a shooting of a  
 movie. Or the one of Alec Guinness I assume is also. When it was done  
 on commission. Of course there's always something like Bacon  
 where they went out somewhere.

433 [KT. What about when you can't find the person in their own home,  
 in their own environment, how do you improvise? ] 435 For instance, with  
 Sutherland?

ST. With Sutherland? Well you know I had no idea. I thought he might have



a house in London. So almost the first, you know, when I said "will you stand here and I'd like to". He said "well I don't own this house. This is not my home." Well I said "I'm glad you told me. I was beginning to wonder, looking at all these paintings you see." So then I went out to the garden, you know, nice big garden. So then we went up to an area that was used as an office and his secretary was there, sort of girl Friday. And I thought this was an ideal place. And it's only after I got the photograph and took it back and printed it that I discovered that he sits like I do with one arm over his head and held by the wrist with the other hand. And I thought - he sits like I do and like my father used to. And it's a very neutral spot. Could be anybody's home - window in the back and a plant. You see.

454 [Robert Frank on a visit here at Charlie Gagnon's house. And I took him one of my magazines and he said "Look this is not my environment." And I said "It's a long walk to Habor." And you're here + I'm here. Let's do the best we can." And I more or less isolated him. It's just a wall and a print - a serigraph of a hand. Quite synbotic. But I didn't think of it

Then; I only saw it later on. I just ~~the~~ saw it and I thought this is a nice little photograph in its relationship. But the geometry was right, you see. Kondelka on the floor of Carter-Benson's living room. Well, when they're there + I'm there, what else can I do? <sup>465</sup> I don't especially seek people out unless they happen to be where I am. Like Margaret Lawrence was living very close to Peterborough. I think it's called. Whatever. Somebody said "you're going there to Trent. Margaret Lawrence lives there. Why don't you photograph her?" So I asked Ian McKlachen who had invited me - he's a writer too, and one of the masters of Trent University. And I said "Ian, do you know Margaret Lawrence?" He said "Yes." This was over the phone. And he arranged that we should call on her. And she was very, very hospitable, very open and marvellous. And she said "come on in." And it was a dreadful day, rainy. And I did one or two in her study with the sort of almost cliché thing - books and things like that. And then in the front of her house, the long veranda, you know. With the pillars. And that's where I got Margaret Lawrence. She was very pleased with what she saw. She had some very complimentary things to say about them. But the thing is, as I said, I have seen a lot of portraits



by young people and old people and I find very often that the people in the portraits are self-conscious. Or rather self-conscious. And I know right ~~the~~ away what has happened. The photographer was self-conscious and the reflection... And I think people reflect the photographer. You know <sup>482</sup> [very often it's like a mirror. And you're the mirror image there reflected. If the mirror works OK then you get a good reflection.] <sup>494</sup> I think very often that's it's being able to put people at their ease. I have no tricks or gimmicks or anything like that. And the thing is this: I think it's very important that the photographer put as little of himself into the portrait as he can. I mean he can't avoid himself because he's there; he's the man doing the work. And yet I feel that every portrait has to be different and yet has to bear the signature of the photographer. You can't avoid that. But instead of putting in a good 75% of yourself I think it's more helpful if you put only 25% of yourself. In other words you're there but you remain more discreet.

(section of Michel Lambeth). 20 sec.

As I said, all my portraits are different because they're done in different surroundings. They don't have a formula. But yet.

if you see a body of the portraits you know there is only one photographer behind that camera.

KT. If I had to find one term to describe your work, I'd probably come up with something like humanist.

ST. Ya that word. Well I have nothing against words like that because I feel that is the function of the camera. You know I speak for my own for my own relationships to the photograph. I feel that there are so many things happening around us why should we go out of our way to manufacture something else.

KT. In that sense your work might be considered in the McLuhan sense of the word, hot whereas a lot of the other work is cool.

ST. Cool is I think, the term they use, eh. Well hot meaning sort of...  
 like they say hot of the press. <sup>554</sup> [Well I think of my work as sort of an eye witness to whatever is happening around, whether it's important or not it doesn't matter. It can be a woman sewing with a machine with the kids. Like that photograph of mine in Jaipur. With that magnificent mural. <sup>559</sup> ] I guess that house must have belonged to someone of means, but somehow that mural is there. I guess somebody just kept putting fresh paint on it. It's beautiful. It's sort of a counterpoint to the very shabby little hole there. <sup>564</sup> But this is or here



what I feel and this is the main thing. To get back to something to what I started to say and never finished. Many years later when the film board sponsored 2 sets. You know, they bought 2 sets and Jeremy Taylor had printed those sets. And Peter Desbarats talked about them - he had a program here and he talked about them on television. And I said to Peter "When I took those photographs, I was just somebody with a camera who was recording things which were going on from day to day." But today I can be almost pompous in saying that I was an eyewitness to history. Which essentially I was. You know, it was one of the greatest events in history, modern history, anyways. After the Russian Revolution + wars + things, this was a great event in history. Perhaps not the greatest event in Chinese history which has many many events.

(section on Denis Bloodworth's "A Chinese Looking Glass") 12 sec.

<sup>599</sup> [Again, reality is what fascinates me more than the things that are perhaps in one's own mind, or emotions that a lot of photographers try to express. I find that poets do it much better. And then the painters do it too. But the poets do it best of all. But then the photographers, I have reservations about; but then, you know that's my

point of view. <sup>or here</sup> ] Somebody else might say, you know, all this documenting and looking at the world, they're more concerned with their own world. <sup>609</sup> ] But I find that sometimes they always wear blinkers because that's all they see. There's so much around us to look at. Again to come back, I was ready for somebody like Cartier-Bresson because I'd already been photographing for a whole year. More than a whole year in India, in the north, in the south. Not in the studio at all. So I was ready for somebody to give me a good hard shove. Which he didn't have to do. And the portrait of course. And he once wrote me a letter, which I don't have but which I typed up for an archive. Luckily I saved that. I must say that he really decided for me what a portrait really was. With the other work, you know I had done some work in '37 and '38, perhaps a few things in '36, and even the picture story thing. You know, I did a thing <sup>actors doing</sup> with Romeo and Juliet, with make-up to make them look more European. And Juliet with a dark wig - they didn't go so far as having a blonde wig. With the whole bit. The balcony scene and all that. I ~~got~~ still have those photographs. Make up in the darkroom - excuse me - in the dressing room. It was very nice. And that's going back to '37. Picture story. For whom? For nobody, really. Just the



idea of doing a story. And for many years the editor of Jim Burke of Life - he died very tragically in a car accident many years after - he told me I had a feeling for photographs in sequence, call it photo-journalism, photo-reportage, whatever high-faluting term you want to give it. What else can I tell you.

(Section about what Gabor said about me!) 10 sec.

KT. Well the picture story that you did <sup>on that pilgrimage</sup> in India

ST. Ah ya. That was for Life. In 1955 when I was in Kashmir ~~for~~ with my wife and my daughter Tony. And Jim Burke said that he couldn't go up to Amanas to do this story, would I go? And I hesitated a bit and Rita said "what are you hesitating for. You want me to go?" And I said "You can go but you can't photograph so I guess I will go." So I went up there. I had a cook and a tent. I was with the writer from the New Yorker, Chris Rand and his 2 children - children, they were 15 yrs old - twins. And so I went up there c 10 thousand pilgrims and photographed it. Unfortunately it was processed it - it was B+W - and the one colour roll got lost somewhere in the schuffle. Ended up there Black Star who was handling a lot of my work at that time. Not too much

because I am unfortunately a very lazy photographer. I don't work as much as I should. So they, thru Christopher Rand who had a friend at National Geographic at that time - can you imagine a B+W story in National Geographic - 1956 October. They used it. And they had already done stories on Amapas. They used most of my photographs + 2 or 3 by other Indian photographers who were on that particular trip in 1955. It was fascinating.

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[But I think the best thing I have done as my <sup>(pause)</sup> sure total of work is my Shanghai work and after that the portraits. I think that is the significant, or what I think, the significant focal points in my photographic life.] 703

KT. So do you think there's a difference between investigating the work oneself or doing work in commission?

ST. Well. Yes. When you work for yourself, you work at your own time + pace, you're working for yourself, you're pleasing yourself. When you're working for someone else you have to please at least one more person, the picture editor or whoever. But at the same time a number of my assignments have produced good photographs. Even assignments from Time mag. have produced the Gilles Vigneault portrait, the Michel Tremblay portrait



and various others that I have done. Not the Clarke Blais. I did Clarke Blaise for Time, but the better one I did for myself later on.

Sometimes it takes a while, Stanley Lewis, the sculptor, I've known for many years - 18-19. I've photographed him on many occasions. I've photographed his various studios, his various places. It became so that he said "what can I give you in return." I've got various pieces of sculpture by him. And prints by him. In exchange. A basket.  
... (continuation about Stanley Lewis) 20 sec

KT. You think there's a difference between knowing the person well and, say, an acquaintance?

ST. I feel that. I was talking to Jim Borcoman yesterday. Avedon doesn't it seems. He's done some of his very good photographs of people that he doesn't even know. But I guess it depends on the individual. For myself. I guess that I feel that I can do better things with people that know me because they already trust me. And they're at ease with me. They're not liable to have, shall we say, too many interference plays, or hedging between too many masks of theirs. Because I know them. (... Jan Reussing, Charlevoix)  
about people who one doesn't know.